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CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

EMANCIPATION OF NEGROES

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AND ON THE

Abolition of the Slave-Trade.

By a West-India Planter.

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CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE
PHYSICAL
CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE
NEGROES



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THE attention of the public has been excited to the subject of slavery by various publications, which have lately issued from the press with a view to prepossess the nation, and to prepare for certain motions which are said to be meditated in Parliament, either for its suppression or limitation. Although the passions of men have been kindled by the assiduity of these writers, and the current sets strongly in favour of any reform that may be proposed; I flatter myself I shall be excused, if I presume to obtrude my sentiments on the subject. It is certainly of moment enough to demand all the light that can be thrown on it by those, who, from a long residence in that part of the

world where the practice principally obtains, have had the best opportunity of acquiring information.

I do not apprehend that it hath yet transpired, what are to be the specific objects of the gentlemen who countenance the reform; but I take it for granted, that they mean either a general or a partial emancipation of the slaves, or an abolition or some modification of the slave-trade. I shall, therefore, consider each of these points separately.

That Slavery is an evil, no man will deny; and therefore it is to be wished, that it could be redressed by an abolition of the state itself, or the total emancipation of slaves; but that, I presume, cannot be the object, because it is impracticable; as well on account of the situation of the national finances, as from political motives.

It is a principle of equity, which certainly will not be dispensed with in a measure avowedly calculated for the advancement of justice, that, where an individual is divested of his interest for the benefit of the community at large, he shall be indemnified, out of the public treasury, to the full extent of his injury. So observant has the Legislature been of this rule, that, when it was lately found advisable to abolish certain offices of the state, of little use, though of grievous salary, it was deemed unjust, to extinguish such as were held by patent, either in possession or reversion, until the death of the patentees, because there was a kind of vested estate in them; though, where no service was done, no reward could in justice be claimed. But, the Legislature having, in tenderness of conscience, thought and determined otherwise, I presume, à fortiori, that

that a West-Indian will not be divested of an estate which he purchased with his money, encouraged by various acts of legislature, without receiving an adequate compensation.

A West-India estate consists of two parts; the lands, with their adjuncts, buildings, &c. and the living stock, viz. cattle and negroes, all which are as much the property of the planter as it is possible for the most authentic statutes of the British Senate and Colonial Assemblies to make them. In this point of view, and as far as respects the interference of legislature, it imports but little what may be the moral right of the planter to his slave, since he possesses an undoubted political right; and, in order to extinguish that right, and to restore the slave to his natural freedom, it is necessary that the master should be paid for him according to his value.

There hath not been, that I know of, any late enumeration of the negro-slaves in our West-India islands; but there is reason to think that I shall be within the truth, if I state them at upwards of four hundred thousand. Now the value of a negro-slave is, *ceteris paribus*, not less than fifty pounds sterling; for that, or more, a planter is willing to give, even when he purchases a large number. If a total emancipation of slaves, therefore, be intended, the cost of the measure will be at least twenty millions of pounds sterling, a sum sufficiently great to exercise the talents of the most able financier. — But this is the cost of the slaves only. The claims of the planters to indemnity will not stop here, as their injuries will extend much further; for, when their slaves, who are the instruments of their agriculture, are taken from them,

their lands become totally unproductive. The tillage of a West-India estate is not effected, like one in England, by the labour of horses and oxen, guided by a few human hands; on the contrary, they must be wrought by men only, or the soil must go untilled, and, of course, yield no income to the owner.

In vain will it be urged, that, notwithstanding the restraints of slavery are removed, and the coercive power of the master annihilated, the lands will still continue to be cultivated, as before, by the negroes, who, though few, will be obliged to work for subsistence at a daily hire. I shall hereafter enter into a consideration of the effects of emancipation on the negroes; and therefore only observe here, that they must know but little of West-India œconomy, or of the nature of negroes, who suppose that negroes will hire themselves out to labour at any price within the power of a planter to pay out of the produce of his estate.—As it is, where slaves, one with the other, are to be obtained for fifty pounds sterling each, the cost of their labour is only the interest on that sum, added to the premium of their insurance and the expence of their maintenance: all which is but a trifle, when compared to the expence that he would be at, if his business was to be effected by freemen.—Yet the profits on his capital, even under this saving mode of supplying labour, are moderate enough, when the circumstances of climate and the hazard to which life is exposed there are considered. Few are the instances where a West-India planter makes more than eight per cent. on his capital, and his purchase must have been uncommonly beneficial to enable him

him to do that ; for, by far the greater number do not render more than five or six per cent. per ann. on the capital stock vested in them. — If, therefore, a West-India planter, by being dispossessed of his interest in his slaves, is obliged to have the work of his estate done by freedmen, at an expence so great as not to allow him an interest on his capital equal to what he made before, or to what he might get in any other way ; it will be incumbent on the legislature to indemnify him ;—and that can only be done by taking his lands and all their appendages at their present just value. Now the value of the lands, with their erections and appendages, and live stock, cannot be less, at a medium, than twice as much as the gross amount of the slaves which were employed to cultivate it. If, therefore, the sum, required to indemnify the planters for the emancipation of their slaves, be at least twenty millions sterl. the sum, that will be required to indemnify them for their lands, &c. will be forty millions ; which, added to the twenty millions for the negroes, will form the enormous mass of sixty millions sterl. I imagine it will not be necessary to do more than briefly to hint at this consequence of emancipating the negroes, to convince the warmest advocate for the measure of the absurdity of indulging any further speculations on a point, which is so unlikely to be accomplished.

But, though it should be admitted, from the reasons above stated, that the sudden and immediate annihilation of slavery cannot take place, it may still be contended, that the same effect may be brought about gradually, by freeing a certain number

number of slaves annually, or at certain periods : in short, by a partial emancipation.

It must be admitted, that the extent of the benefit proposed, by freeing a certain number of negroes at any stated time, will be proportioned to the number of negroes freed ; and the expence of the measure, to the public, will be exactly in the same proportion ; for, as there are very few, if any, plantations, which possess more negroes than are absolutely necessary to work them, the depriving a planter of any number of his slaves, is so far to impair his power of cultivation, and, of course, proportionally to lessen the product of his estate. If, therefore, the product of his estate, or his income issuing from it, be lessened, he will, with the best title imaginable, claim an indemnity proportioned to that loss.— Now supposing, for example, that it be judged expedient to set free one negro out of every hundred annually, the loss, which the owners of the slaves will sustain, will not be merely the value of the slaves considered independently, but considered relatively to the injury resulting from the privation of their labour ; so that the compensation, which will be demanded for the annual enfranchisement of the one hundredth part of the slaves of the sugar-colonies, will be precisely the same part of the sixty millions above proved to be necessary to indemnify the planters, in case of a total emancipation of their slaves ; that is, six hundred thousand pounds, which is certainly no small sum to be annually added to the national burthen. It requires no great extent of arithmetical knowledge to demonstrate, that, by the operation of such a sum applied to that object, even the national debt itself would be extinguished

in less time than would be required to annihilate slavery, the increase by generation being taken into the account.

But, though the expence attending the enfranchisement of a certain number of negroes, annually, would be so great, proportionate advantages would not arise from it.—It may even be doubted whether there would be any advantage at all ; for, admitting, for a moment, (what may hereafter with great propriety be contested,) that, so far as the emancipation goes, those who are its objects may be relieved, great doubts may be made whether the totality of the evil would be lessened for many years to come ; there being just reason to conclude, that the rigours of slavery will be aggravated to those who still remain subject to it ; for, the ordinary consequence of working an estate with an inadequate strength of negroes has even been the requiring an excess of labour from such slaves as they have. It is the anxiety of making the most of an estate, which excites those severities against which the oppugners of slavery have declaimed ; for West-India estates render only in proportion as they are wrought. Hence a disproportionate gang are almost sure of being over-worked ; — whilst one, that is more than sufficient for the labour of an estate, experiences many indulgences. Not being worked beyond their strength, they are healthy and happy, and breed faster ; and correction is chiefly confined to a few perverse subjects, such as are found in all societies.—So far, therefore, from expecting the evils of slavery to be lessened by a partial emancipation of slaves, we ought to look for a contrary effect from it ; the only way, that

that I know of, to render the condition of slaves happier, being to feed them better, and to increase their number, on every estate, up to the *maximum* of its demand.

This reasoning, against the partial enfranchisement of slaves, applies also only to the case of there being no means left to the planters of recruiting their gangs, by replacing the various drafts made for that purpose, from Guinea ships or any other sources. If any such means are open to them, they will certainly be resorted to, and the planters will buy new negroes with the money for which they sell their old ones ; and, in such a case, neither the evils of slavery nor the number of slaves will be at all diminished. — The proposed measure, therefore, would be absurd, unless accompanied by another ; viz. the abolition of the African trade for slaves ; but, before I enter on the consideration of that subject, I beg leave to bestow some thoughts on the consequence of the emancipation of negroes.

Let us suppose the difficulties, of a pecuniary nature, surmounted ; that the sixty millions have been raised, and applied to so virtuous an object ; that slavery is annihilated, and the negroes restored to their primitive freedom. — What effects may reasonably be expected to arise from the exercise of that freedom to the negroes themselves, and to society ?

A few negroes, the most sensible and best disposed, will probably have their condition improved, as they may eat and drink, and clothe themselves better, with less labour ; but, to a very great majority of them, nine-tenths at least, liberty would be

be no blessing. They would not know what rational use to make of it.

Those, who are acquainted with the African genius and temper, must know, that negroes are so intolerably ignorant and inconsiderate, that they, at present, do no more work, in general, than they are compelled to do by the terrors of punishment. If left to their own exertions, that they will not, in general, work, is evinced, by daily experience, in those islands where considerable portions of good land are allotted them to cultivate, in provisions, on their own account; one half-day or day, in every week, (exclusive of Sunday,) being allowed for that purpose. But, in order to induce them to avail themselves of that indulgence, compulsion must be used; for, to make them work where they themselves are to reap the advantage, no less attention, on the part of the manager, is necessary, than if they were working for the benefit of their owners, (unless, which is very frequent, they procure inferior slaves to work for them, from terror or other motives.)—It may be held a maxim, not universal, indeed, but general, that negroes will sooner starve than labour, were that the only alternative; but, as they have another option, either to starve or steal, they prefer the latter, and subsist by depredation. Offences of that kind are now summarily punished, either by the owner of the slave or the person on whose property the trespass has been committed; in most cases lightly and inadequately, let the calumniators of the colonies say what they will.—But, if negroes cease to be objects of private coercion and protection, they will be amenable only to the laws of their country, and must be adjudged by those

laws, which annex death to those transgressions now punished only with the whip. Those laws cannot be relaxed in their favour; for, in order to preserve peace to society and security to property, they must be most rigorously enforced; whence a frequency of capital punishments, that will be infinitely more afflicting, to a real sense of humanity, than the exaggerated details of cruelty by which the pity of the world is now attempted to be excited. The gibbet must be substituted to the whip. — But hanging, though effectual in subduing the evil propensities of the individual on whom it is inflicted, acts not here as an example to deter others from the commission of similar crimes. It is needless to investigate the cause of this fact at the present moment; but negroes, for the most part, have so much want of mental exertion, that they encounter death at the gallows with the same stupid insensibility and indifference as they would do a simple flagellation.

Such, therefore, would be the consequence of admitting the mass of negroes to the possession, I will not say to the enjoyment, of freedom, as far as respects the negroes themselves.—Its effects, on the interest of the public at large, would be no less than the total loss of the sugar-trade; for, if negroes are so much indisposed to labour, as not to work even for their own necessities; certainly they will not hire themselves out, and submit to the regular labours of a sugar-estate, for money. The consequence of this would be, that no sugar would be produced; and, whether or not the nation is prepared to abandon that trade to others, must be decided in its proper place.

I come

I come next to consider the probable effects of an abolition of the slave-trade.

Certainly nothing is more easy, than to prevent the further legal importation of slaves into our sugar-colonies. An act of the British legislature may accomplish it instantly; and the officers of the custom-house possess powers sufficient to give a formal effect to the prohibition.—Were other European states to concur in the measure, and to pass similar laws for the abolition of the slave-trade, which would leave us all in the same relative situation we now are, perhaps nothing could be more salutary; or tend more, not only to prevent the further increase of slavery, but also to lessen some of its existing evils; for, as the increased price of colony-products would be universally commensurate to the decrease of quantity, the real income of the planter would possibly suffer no diminution. He would not, therefore, have the same inducement to over-work his slaves which he otherwise would have; and, having no other possible source of supply than from natural generation, it is probable, in a course of time, that the breeding of negroes, and their preservation, would be attended to with more anxiety than at present.—But, until every nation in Europe, now participating in the slave-trade, concur in putting an end to it, any law of the British legislature to that effect, however humane in principle, must be nugatory and unwise in effect:—nugatory, because the evil intended to be removed will still exist, that is, slaves will continue to be imported clandestinely into the British islands; and unwise, because, while Great-Britain loses all the advantages

now derived from the consumption of her manufactures, and the profit arising from her shipping engaged in the African commerce, other nations, less scrupulous, will doubtless profit by her political folly, and embark more largely in that trade than they have hitherto done. Instead of receiving a large part of their supply, as they now do, from us; they will not only import negroes sufficient to supply their own demand, but probably ours also; for, so necessary are slaves to the use of the West-India planters, that, while there is a possibility of obtaining them, they will be sought for and procured, though at an expence so prodigiously increased, as to disable the British planter still further from engaging with the French in a competition at foreign markets for the sale of their produce. — Moreover, those, who have any local acquaintance with the islands, must know, that no expectation can be more idle than that of closing their ports so effectually, as to prevent negroes in any number from being smuggled into them without hazard of seizure.— Therefore, without reaping any advantage whatever to the cause of humanity, we deprive ourselves of a solid commercial advantage; as others will greedily embrace what we abandon. There is indeed great reason to think, that our own countrymen, who are among the first speculators in Europe, and have been long engaged in that traffic, to which they have large capitals appropriated, will not altogether desist from their adventures; but that they will contrive to extract advantages from it, though circuitously and under the cover of foreign passes.

But, let us suppose that all possible chance of obtaining negro-slaves, from the French or other European

ropean islands, is cut off, and that the planters have no resource but in the natural supply by generation; will the condition of the slaves be amended? I aver it will not.

All supply by importation being intercepted, the number of negro-slaves employed in our colonies will diminish. At present they diminish on most estates every year, in consequence, it is alleged, of excessive labour and ill-treatment. Labour (which is inseparable from the condition of a slave) will doubtless, in a climate such as that of the British sugar-islands, tend to produce sterility, and disorders which terminate in death; but how can these effects be prevented, otherwise than by an abolition, or so great a relaxation of labour as is totally incompatible with the purpose for which negroes are purchased. Negroes are not, in the first instance, bought for the increase of the species, but for their work; and, if a certain quantity of work be not done, their owners must be ruined; therefore, the condition of slaves being such as necessarily exposes them to accidents conduced to depopulation, we need not be surprised that their numbers do decrease. — As to ill-treatment, so far as it consists in severe correction, I am persuaded that it is very rarely a cause of their decrease; for, I appeal to the candid testimony of those who have visited the islands, and have had an opportunity of entering into the detail of West-India œconomies, whether the punishments administered on a plantation be not generally confined to a few bad subjects, perhaps the twentieth part of a gang. And in what community are there not of that description, whom the laws, unable to reform, are obliged to exterminate?

nate? — But there are many other causes of depopulation besides those above enumerated. Sterility of the females is one; and that, not arising from excessive labour, but from their exposure to the weather, and other modes of life which are productive of menstrual obstructions; and still more from their indiscriminate commerce with the men; for, they are not less lavish of their favours than certain females of another complexion in our metropolis; and how little population is indebted to *their* efforts we all know. — A third cause is the disproportion of females originally imported from Africa.—The argument, derived from the consumption of the species, in favour of the abolition of their import, will apply equally to the non-importation of *white people* into the colonies; for *their* decrease keeps pace with that of the negroes; and the hazards, to which human life is exposed in that unhealthy climate, have been thought by many to furnish one good reason, why adventurers there ought to derive greater profits from their speculations, either commercial or agricultural, than are usually gained at home; where the business of acquiring money is transacted with more satisfaction and personal safety. — But, granting what is contended for, that the decrease of negroes arises from excessive labour and mal-treatment; will the *abolition of the slave-trade* conduce to their being worked less, or punished with less severity? The question has not been doubted by those who countenance the measure; but I am, for my own part, (as I have intimated before,) decidedly of opinion, that a contrary effect will result from it.

If

If negroes are to labour less, a smaller immediate profit will undoubtedly arise to the planter from his estate. It is not, therefore, in common sense to be supposed, that he will suffer his work to remain undone, and his income to be contracted, merely that he may breed more negroes. The number of negroes, therefore, decreasing, and the deaths being principally of the effectives, or grown negroes, while the births are non-effective infants, the strength, or power, of their gangs will annually diminish, for a time at least, if the only reliance allowed by the new system is upon the power of generation. This diminution of strength must be productive of one of two consequences : — Either the planter must lose so much of his income as was produced by those effectives whose contribution of labour ceased with their death : Or he must do the same work with the survivors, that is, he must superadd the labour of the dead to the task of the living, and increase the severities necessary to extort it from them ; both of which causes will further tend to depopulation, and of course to the evils proposed to be remedied.

It may be said, that it is not for the interest of the planter to act in this manner, because his loss, by the destruction of his slaves, will more than balance the benefits arising from their labour. I admit it : The remote consequence may and probably will be, ruin to the interest of the planter ; but men are not usually governed by views of such remote, at the expence of present, good ; Paradise itself having no charms sufficiently powerful to arrest their improper pursuits in this life, and to engage them to the performance of their duty. The primary object

ject of a planter being, like that of most other men, to be relieved from present inconvenience, whether arising from the pressure of debt or the impulse of appetite, he considers only what promotes that purpose, and hazards consequences which he hopes to escape.— This cupidity of present profit, to the destruction of future interest, which is so inherent in human nature, may be allowed as some apology for those (and the number is very great) who are so deeply indebted, either to British or colony creditors, as to have no other chance of escaping immediate ruin than by an unremitting exertion of industry.— But the industry of a planter consists in the labour of his slaves : It is through their organs that his efforts are to be exerted : Therefore let no man wonder, if, where *necessity* urges, they should be over-strained. And, that the preventing of any additions to their gangs from taking place, by prohibiting the importation of negroes, will *produce* such a necessity, I think is most manifest.

That there is a possibility of negroes multiplying and increasing their number by natural generation, is most certain ; but that can only be done under circumstances particularly favourable. The females must be equal, or nearly equal, to the males in number, which is very rarely the case ; and the labourers must be fully adequate to the labour.— The case of Doctor Map (published in Dean Nichols's Letter) proves nothing more, than that the Doctor had the good fortune to grow so rich, by one estate of twenty thousand pounds value, as to be able to purchase another of twelve thousand, and to leave forty thousand pounds to his son, besides a suitable

suitable fortune to his daughter; for, as the Dean has not thought proper to enter into particulars, he helps us but little in forming a judgement of the means by which this extraordinary saving was effected; whether it was from the produce of his estate, or from the breeding of his negroes. Indeed he insinuates that it arose from the breeding of negroes; as he tells us the estate of twelve thousand pounds was bought to receive the overflowings of his gang. But many gentlemen, who are conversant in matters of that nature, and have not been quite so successful in their efforts, seem to entertain a doubt whether Doctor Map might not have been aided in his accumulation by the produce of his estate. But, as the Dean has given us reason to think, that it was from the fecundity of his gang alone that all this was accomplished; it furnishes a striking proof, what great things may be effected in the way of generation; as well as that there are, in the West-Indies, some persons who have true notions of humanity.—But, for humanity to have full scope, it is necessary for a man to be either unincumbered in his circumstances; or to be possessed of such a sufficient strength, for the labour of his estate, as to enable him, without prejudice to his mesne income, to grant extraordinary indulgences to his negroes; for, otherwise, it is probable their number will decrease, though he may still advance his pecuniary affairs.

That the number of negroes, in our West-India islands, are not kept up by natural generation, has been admitted; but I believe on enquiry it will appear, that their total decrease is not by any means so great as it has been generally imagined; particularly

in those islands which have no waste lands for new settlers to proceed on.—I am unable to state the importation into the British islands ; but I am persuaded the fact will justify me, if I say that at least one-half of the negroes, imported from the coast of Africa into the Windward and Leeward Islands, are re-exported to foreign colonies, particularly the French ; whole cargoes, of three or four hundred each, being purchased either by the subjects of France or their agents in the English Islands.—As to the Islands of Jamaica, St. Vincent, Dominique, Tobago, Grenada, and the Grenadines, a great addition has actually been made to their population, within the last four and twenty years. Jamaica having always had much uncultivated land, and the peace of 1763 giving us a great deal more in the ceded islands ; many new settlements in these colonies were effected by adventurers from Europe and the other islands :—But this could not be done without labourers. A new and extraordinary demand, therefore, arose, which could only be supplied from the coast of Africa ; and the increase of population, since that period, in the islands above enumerated, cannot amount to so little as one hundred and twenty thousand, now existing and added to the stock of slaves ; the produce of whose labour contributes not a little to the extensive commerce, which renders this nation so flourishing,

When the lands, ceded by the French by the peace of sixty-three, were put up at auction under the sanction of parliament, and disposed of (in many instances) at prices exorbitantly high ; they were purchased under the idea, that the means of cultivating and rendering them productive would always be

be open. Such a condition was implied by the contract, and the faith of parliament virtually pledged for its performance.—Should the islands, therefore, be shut against the further importation of negroes, all those lands, which are now uncultivated, must for ever remain so; and the public faith be broken with those adventurers, on whose lands settlements are not yet formed or completed, to their great prejudice, if not their total ruin.

In order to effect that increase of population, which has taken place in Jamaica and the ceded islands, no doubt a much greater number of negroes have been imported into those islands, and remained there, than that which I have stated as their present increase. This must necessarily be the case, as the disforesting and unsettling of lands, in unhealthy climates, is an employment that occasions a great expenditure of human life. — Humanity would be shocked, were a catalogue to be exhibited of the European adventurers, who have either prematurely perished or been ruined, or both, in their attempts to effect their settlements. Few, very few indeed, have succeeded, and survived to reap the fruit of their adventures. If such has been the fate of the white settlers, that of the negroes, it may be presumed, was not better.—But, the principal difficulties are now surmounted; the lands are cleared, and morasses drained; and, though the demand for slaves has not yet ceased, nor will for some time to come, it is to be presumed that it will be much less in future, for the British islands, than it hath heretofore been. — Since the conclusion of the peace, indeed, a greater number of negroes than usual have been imported, to repair the waste occasioned by

the five preceding years of war, which were fatal to the slaves, as well as to the interest of their masters; there having been a heavy assessment of labour levied by the French for the construction of fortifications; which, co-operating with a non-importation during that period, and with the suppression of American supplies of provisions, actually produced the consequences I have been pointing out as likely to ensue from the abolition of the slave-trade.—But, from the present time, I should conceive the supply of new negroes that will be required for the culture of estates in the British islands, if invariably applied to their use alone, and not suffered to be re-exported to the French or Spanish settlements, will be much less than it has heretofore been.—But, any interference on the part of the legislature, either in abolishing or restricting that supply, will be impolitic in the highest degree, for the reasons I have assigned above; that is, from the tendency which such restrictions will have in aggravating the sufferings of the slaves and accelerating their depopulation. That a continued exertion of the human frame, for any length of time, up to the full reach of its powers, will exhaust nature, and in the end abridge life, is most certain; and that a law, such as is projected by the society for the abolition of slavery, would occasion such an exaction of labour from the slaves now in the islands, I think is equally demonstrable, though I may not have had the happiness to have made the subject so clear as I could have wished.

Having hitherto confined my observations to the effects that will arise to the slaves and slave-owners from

from an abolition of the importation of negroes into the islands, I shall next proceed to consider the effects which may be expected to arise from it to commerce.

The African trade has ever been considered as the most beneficial of any this nation carries on, in proportion to its extent. When the subject comes to be agitated in parliament, authentic statements will probably be produced of the amount of British manufactures that are exported for the purchase of negro-slaves; which I have no doubt will appear so considerable, as to suggest the necessity of proceeding with great caution in the enacting of laws, that are to annihilate so productive a source of employment to our manufacturers and of profit to the national stock, without more certain grounds are held out, than any of those that yet appear, of benefit to result to humanity from the measure. And, notwithstanding some gentlemen, of those towns whose interests will be most affected by the measure, have, with a disinterestedness that does them honour, associated to promote the abolition of the slave-trade; I have no doubt, but that others of established character, and equal pretensions to humanity, will view the subject in a different light; and withhold their assent from an innovation, whose effects must necessarily be very injurious to the interests of this country, while its operation elsewhere is at least problematical: for, if I have been right in my former arguments, it by no means follows that fewer slaves will be carried than at present from the coast of Africa, or that the condition of the negroes now in the islands will be mended, by our putting a stop to the trade. But, the loss of our exports to Africa is

but

but a part of the injury that will be done to this country ; for, supposing the prohibition of their importation to be so rigorously enforced, as that none shall find their way into the islands through any channel (a circumstance, I imagine, not probable) ; the quantity of the West-India produce, which is dependent on the labour of slaves, will (and necessarily must, even from the reasons urged for the reform), diminish every year, so as to be felt in the receipts of the Exchequer ; to which the sugar-colonies have been calculated to administer two millions sterling annually. Besides, in proportion as the number of negroes decrease in the West-Indies, the demand for British goods, either eatable, wearable, or for the culture of the soil, will decrease in due proportion ; for the quantity of the consumption must be governed by the number of the consumers. If we consider the vast quantity of other goods that are annually exported from this kingdom to the West-Indies, we shall see still further reason to be alarmed ; for the injuries which our manufacturers will suffer in that way, will be much greater than those they will sustain by the cessation of the exports to Africa.—But, it is not in the consumption of their manufactures only that this country will be affected. It will suffer also in the quantity of its shipping, and the number of its seamen, to which the West-India trade gives employment ; both of which, it may be presumed, will be much less than they now are.

Having thus briefly examined the consequences of this popular system, which seems to receive so much countenance ; viewed as well respecting the negroes,

negroes, to whose relief the reform is avowedly applied, as the manufactures, commerce, revenue, and shipping, of the parent-state ; I shall beg leave to bestow a few considerations on the political effects of such a regulation.

It seems to be pretty well understood, that, in the present situation of Europe, which is a state of commercial competition, every nation is intent on acquiring as much trade as possible, in order to obtain wealth and maritime influence ; as it is commerce which supplies not only the pecuniary means, but the agents also of naval war. But, though every nation is in pursuit of the same object, it is from the rivalry of France that we have the most to apprehend, in consequence of her power, vicinity, and jarring interest. Her attention having of late been unremittingly applied to the extension of her commerce, it is not to be doubted, but that, should the slave-trade be abandoned by this country, it will be taken up by them ; and prosecuted with the same energy, that characterises all the proceedings of that enterprising nation. We may foresee, from this source, such an immediate profit and aggrandisement of their West-India colonies, as will go near to give them as decided a superiority over us in commerce, as they now have in number of citizens and extent of dominion.—As the case stands at present, the French West-India islands are more populous in white and negro inhabitants, and their products of every kind more abundant, than in the islands settled by the English ; St. Domingo alone supplying nearly as much as all our own islands together ; and its produce is still susceptible of great augmentation, from its containing extensive tracts of

of the most excellent land, that have not yet been cultivated from the want of negroes. But, if negroes are supplied to them to the full extent of their wants, as they undoubtedly will be at a cheap and easy rate, in case this country shall withdraw her competition and abandon the slave-trade ; we may soon expect to find the trade of France with her colonies, four times as great as that which England will carry on with hers ; for, while the former shall rapidly be increasing in population and produce, the latter must decline in both respects ; and he must be a shallow politician indeed, who has not sagacity enough to discover the relative influence which such an event will have on the marine of the two kingdoms.

But it has been suggested, that the other European powers will concur in the system proposed of abolishing the slave-trade. Should it really be so, I shall be one of the first to do homage to the zeal of the society who have stood forward for the accomplishment of so noble an object ; but, until this universal concurrence of the European states, who are engaged in that traffic shall be so effectually secured for its abolition, as to leave no suspicion of their engagements being contravened or eluded, I think, though there may be much of equity and good example, there can be very little of political prudence, in our adopting it.

Though, in discussing this subject of the slave-trade, I have taken the liberty of advancing sentiments very different from those which are embraced by the gentlemen who are associated for its abolition ; I nevertheless entertain a high regard for the motives by which they are governed. The cause they

they plead is of the first magnitude, as it is that of human right ; and, in such a cause, even errors are respectable.— But these gentlemen have certainly considered slavery too much in the abstract ; and, in the excess of their zeal, have overlooked the consequences that would now result from its abolition, not only to the interest of the planters, (for that is to be little considered when the rights of human-nature are in question,) but also to the commercial and political interests, and perhaps existence, of this country, as well as to the negroes themselves. It is indeed most deeply to be regretted that the slavery of negroes ever obtained the sanction of law ; but it is among the effects of that discovery of the new world, which has exalted the discoverer to the rank of one of the greatest benefactors to human kind. — The language of panegyric has been exhausted in favour of Columbus ; but, after all, what are the advantages derived to mankind from his researches ? Curiosity has been indulged ; the terraqueous globe has been better ascertained ; the *materia medica* has acquired some valuable drugs ; our tables are enriched with luxuries before unknown to our ancestors ; and the quantity of precious metal that circulates in Europe has been prodigiously multiplied. But these advantages, whose influence on the happiness of the citizens of Europe is questionable, have unhappily been obtained by the slaughter of five or six millions of the aboriginal inhabitants of America, and by the transportation of as many more Africans to replace them and fulfil the purposes of slavery. If to this be added the loss which the old world has sustained of its own inhabitants, who have voluntarily expatriated in quest of fortune, (though

very few have attained the object of their pursuit, in proportion to those who have miscarried in their adventures, and either languished in poverty or died prematurely;) we shall see good reason to qualify the praises which have been bestowed on this great man, and to consider him only in the light of an intrepid and successful navigator, but by no means as a benefactor to the species : Benefits so moderate, and evils so immeasurably great, having resulted from his discoveries. — Negro-slavery is certainly not among the least of those evils; but, as it has been established for so long a time, and is now so interwoven with our commercial system and circumstances of finance, any attempt, at this day, either to annihilate it entirely, or to restrain it as to prevent any further accession of slaves to the colonies; though it may be morally right, must be politically wrong, absurd, and impracticable; the most precious interests of this country being implicated in the measure, (and of these alone we are at present speaking.)

If the question be put nakedly, whether slavery be an evil, and if it be not just to prevent negroes from being enslaved? there is not a West-India planter on the other side of the water who, from the evidence of his own feelings, would not answer in the affirmative.—But surely this is not the way in which questions, involving so many considerations of great magnitude, ought to be put. Let the proposition be fairly and candidly stated with all its circumstances, and let it embrace as well the probable benefit, as the possible injury that may attend it; and I believe there will be many, besides those connected

nected with West-India property, who will withhold their assent from it.—In fact, it is not whether the traffic in negroes shall cease or not; but whether Great-Britain shall or shall not retain her power. Give but to France (what the law suggested by the society proposes to do) a facility of saturating her colonies with negroes; and you infallibly give her such means of extending her commerce and increasing her marine, as will leave little hope of this country being able to contest the sovereignty of the ocean with her.—Persons in the ardour of their enthusiasm may exclaim, perish all considerations which are incompatible with justice and morality! But this will by no means serve the purpose of the politician, (of whom alone we are here speaking,) to whom it is not always permitted to square his conduct by the exact theory of moral rectitude. Public utility is his principle; and it is upon that principle that government, as well as justice itself, is founded. Upon what else is it, that the right of private, and especially landed, property, has obtained an establishment? for Nature recognises no such distinctions. The Deity having created all things for the use of all men, the exclusive appropriation of land and many goods is an invasion of his primitive institutes. But, so necessary is this principle of public utility to society and state-convenience, that the mind revolts not from acts of atrocious injustice in breach of natural right, when the safety of the state renders it indispensable; for, so permanent is this principle, that it abrogates, annuls, or dispenses with, every other, human and divine.—What else can excuse the practice which obtains in this country, (where personal rights are more accurately

defined and better preserved than in any other,) of hurrying the peaceable citizen from the bosom of his family to the service of war, or the immuring of a freeman for life who is unable to fulfil a pecuniary contract? These are violations of the moral law, as great as that of domestic slavery.—The magnitude of the cases being so disproportionate, I am sensible that no argument could be deduced from their analogy, were the abolition of the slave-trade to be considered as acting only on the interest of the West-India planters; but I trust it will appear, to those who enter a little into the subject, that the slavery of negroes having been so long established, and contributing so largely to the commerce of this kingdom, cannot now be either rashly annihilated or restrained, without hazarding effects that may convulse this country to its center.

But it may be asked, is nothing to be done for this degraded part of the species? Must the West-India planters be still permitted to exercise their lawless tyranny over subjects, endowed like themselves not only with bodily feeling, but with mental reflexion? There would be no end of the impasioned invectives which declamation may urge, to rouse the resentment of the public, and to obtain their approving voice to a system intrinsically so equitable and compassionate as the one proposed by the society, and with a view to which paragraphs are daily published in the newspapers.—Without arrogating the merits of superior sensibility, I flatter myself there are a great many in the possession of negro-slaves, who, being no less destitute of the finest feelings of men than those who areconcerting the destruction

destruction of the slave-trade; would be happy to join their endeavours to effect a reform, and to diminish the rigours of slavery. Much may be done that way.

The African trade, as it is now conducted, has for its object not only the supplying our own islands, but also those of other nations, with slaves; and, until lately, even on that extensive scale, so far from being contemplated with the horror which the mention of it is now apt to excite, it has been looked upon as a national concern; and has even been favoured with the countenance of government, by the provisions made for its advancement in an article of a treaty for the Assiento Contract. This protection was no doubt afforded to it, from an assurance that the trade could not be carried on too largely, even in behalf of strangers, as it procured such important advantages to the manufactures and commerce of the country.—If this new-born morality of the nation now revolts from the idea of such an abominable policy, it may be considered whether this policy may not be so narrowed, as to obtain very valuable advantages to the species, at less expence than would arise to the public from its total abolition.

The African trade is in the first instance beneficial to this country from the consumption which it occasions of its manufactures, and the profit it affords to private adventurers; for, as to the shipping and seamen employed in this branch of the system, they are certainly of subaltern consequence; and it may even be doubted whether they are not attended with disadvantages. Now, though the supply of negroes be absolutely necessary, for the reasons above stated,

to

to our own colonies, with a view to advance their settlement and to increase their population, it does not appear to be at all useful to this country to supply them to foreigners, any further than as their sale promotes the first purposes of trade. On the contrary, so far as it is necessary to the progression of such colonies, the French for instance ; it is really hurtful to the interests of Great-Britain; because it contributes to the increase of their products, and of course to the aggrandisement of their marine. Therefore that branch of the Guinea-trade, as being prejudicial to the real interest of the nation, may and ought to be discouraged on every account. At the same time, if effectual provision be made to prevent negroes, brought by our ships, from being collusively purchased, and smuggled out of the English islands to the French or Spaniards ; I imagine that one-half of the negroes now imported will be sufficient for the purposes of our islands.

Besides the advantages that will be gained to the interests of humanity and those of the nation, by limiting the Guinea-trade to our own colonies ; even that trade, so limited, may be subjected to regulations highly conducive to the preservation of the species.

It is notorious to those who are at all acquainted with the subject ; that, on the principles on which the Guinea-trade is now conducted, a great many negroes die on-board the ships before they arrive at the ports of their destination. Whence arises this shocking mortality ? Clearly from the great number crowded together, and the necessity which that number imposes of confining them closely to prevent their

their rising on the crew, whence a pestilential air proceeds that engenders disease. A Guinea-vessel of three hundred tons will sometimes leave the coast with six hundred slaves; and a vessel of the same size employed in the transportation of troops, (slaves of another nature,) for a long voyage, would convey only one hundred and fifty; which is at the rate of one man for two tons instead of two to one, producing a difference of four to one. — This evil calls for a remedy which is obvious. Let the African traders be restricted to a certain number of slaves, in proportion to the tonnage of their vessels: Perhaps one may be allowed to a ton; but I think a greater proportion should not be permitted on any account; and let the crew also bear a fixed proportion to the number of the slaves: By these means the confinement of the negroes need not be so strict, as the danger of their insurrection will be lessened; and, by keeping the ships clearer between and above decks, the air may be preserved in a purer and more respirable state.

The second point to be objected to in the Guinea business, is the advanced ages of the negroes; many really superannuated and hoary being taken on-board, who do not survive the third or fourth year of their transportation, even if they are fortunate enough to outlive the passage. This is one great cause of the depopulation seen in the islands; for certainly negroes of that description are the most unfit subjects for slavery, and scarcely ever become useful labourers; from the difficulty which the human frame feels, at an advanced period of life, in accommodating itself to new habits, particularly any that require a constant exertion. They are besides

sides sensible of the deepest regrets at their change of condition ; and of course are the most injured by the privation of freedom.— If the importation, therefore, of slaves be confined to the supply of the British islands, I would advise that none should be suffered to be imported who exceed the age of five and twenty. As there is no having recourse to a baptismal register to ascertain that point, I am aware that no accurate criterion can be substituted for the purpose ; but still means may be devised, which will operate to restrain the importation of old negroes. As for children and young people, they are not only the fittest for the purpose, but also those to whom slavery is least an evil ; and they universally prove, in the long run, the most beneficial purchases to their masters.

It has been asserted, and with truth, that two-third of males and one of females generally constitute the assortment of a Guinea-cargo. Now, as I conceive that women are at least as necessary to propagation as men, I would propose that this rule (particularly at present) should be reversed ; or at least that every Guinea-ship should bring as many females as males ; for the disproportion now subsisting between the sexes is, as I observed before, one great reason why generation does not succeed as it ought to do.

These are the principal circumstances which appear to me capable of being reformed in the African slave-trade, for the present at least, without endangering the serious consequences before pointed out. I am sensible they are such, as if adopted will tend to raise the price of slaves to the planters ; but from that, possibly, certain advantages may arise.

I will

I will not pretend to say, that the slave trade, so far as it concerns the cultivation of British sugar-estates, may not at some future period be abolished. I am even disposed to think it may, provided the planters be allowed time to prepare for the event by stocking their estates to the full extent of their demands. When they have before their eyes the necessity of subsisting from the generation to proceed from their own stock, they will doubtless be at the pains of procuring a due proportion of females; and will consider their breeding as a more essential part of management than they have hitherto done.

I cannot take upon me to say, what time will be required before such a cessation of the import from Africa may take place; but it is obvious to every body, that men and women are not bred in an instant. Many years, eighteen or twenty, must elapse, after they are born, before they attain such strength of body, as to be able to render much service on an estate. The proper period therefore for completing such a reform is yet very distant, upon the most favourable calculation.

In the mean time I give my hearty assent to a revision and repeal of such of the colonial statutes as press too hard on the slaves; and that such new ones may be enacted, as are necessary to defend them from the treatment they too frequently meet with, and secure them in other respects a more comfortable state. But, in order to effect this, let gentlemen be cautious of embracing any visionary or impracticable scheme of reform, which, by tending to a virtual emancipation of the slaves from the authority of their masters, will produce such an universal

versal confederacy among the planters, as must defeat the effect of such provisions and render them nugatory.

The utmost that a law of the legislature of this country should pretend to attempt, is to compel the obdurate tyrant, who has not the happiness to be possessed of the sensibilities of a man, to do that from necessity which others will do from choice. That some of the latter description do sometimes occur, appears even in the reports of the Rev. Mr. Ramsay; who has celebrated one gentleman* for his humane treatment of his slaves. That gentleman was undoubtedly possessed of qualities eminently good, and which deserved his praise; but it was not to those qualities that he was indebted for the panegyric. He was the particular friend and patron of the reverend writer: Had he been otherwise, he in all probability would not have been exempted from the censure so lavishly and indiscriminately dealt to the other inhabitants of the island where he lived.

Having introduced the name of this writer, without whose labours the subject of slavery would not, probably, have been so much agitated at this day, I cannot dismiss him without further mention; as well

* The reader will observe, that the gentleman alluded to by Mr. Ramsay in page 96 of his Essay, had a gang of negroes more numerous than was absolutely necessary for the work of his estate; whence proceeded his ability to indulge them without injury to its produce, which was very ample in proportion to its extent. His gang increased by generation. — This instance exemplifies my position, that negroes increase only in circumstances where the estate is fully handed compared with the work required, and strengthens my argument against the sudden abolition of the slave-trade.

to rescue his character from unmerited reproach, as to caution his readers against the exaggerations of his pen. As a husband and father; he was affectionate and provident. As a pastor; decent, pious, temperate, and exemplary. As a master of slaves; so far was he from indulging in the exercise of cruelty, that he was remarkably abstemious in the use of discipline, even on necessary occasions. He was charitable to the poor; and punctual in his pecuniary transactions. His good qualities were many: but at the same time his temper was prone to irritation; and, if not absolutely vindictive, he was at least extremely liberal in the use of injurious epithets, as appears from his writings; which have drawn on him the correction of the learned journalist under whose review they have passed, though otherwise sufficiently disposed to favour his cause.— Unfortunately his book was written during a state of warfare with his parishioners; a contest unprovoked, it must be allowed, by any act on his part inconsistent with the character of a good man, but suggested by pique and prosecuted by party on the other side. However, he has combined his own injuries with the injuries of the slaves; and given scope to his resentment, while he appears an advocate in the cause of humanity.—That his book contains a great many truths, I wish, for the honour of human nature, I could deny. Where authority exists, it is too apt to be abused. Slavery, therefore, necessarily supposes such a state of oppression and consequent abasement, as is unpractised among the freer orders of society, and for a good reason, because it is untolerated. But to suppose those oppressions either so frequent or severe as they are charged to be,

would certainly be to give too great a degree of credit to his misrepresentation.

As to the particular points necessary to be amended in the constitution of slavery, I shall forbear to enlarge upon them here, as they are somewhat foreign to the matters proposed to be examined in these sheets.—But, if the gentlemen, who are actively engaged in the pursuit of a reform, will condescend to accept such lights, as may be furnished by those who have had an opportunity of acquiring information on the subject; I have no doubt but that many in the West-India interest now in London, who are not less respectable for their humanity than their fortunes, would most cordially co-operate for its modification by such hints, as are alone in their power to supply.

In discussing the preceding topics, I have not attempted to draw any arguments against the emancipation of slaves, or the abolition of the slave-trade, as affecting the interests of the West-India planters; since I have taken it for granted, that in the first instance they will be indemnified; and in the next, that their eventual injuries are of little weight to be put into competition with an object of humanity of so great magnitude, as the preservation of many thousand lives annually.—But I cannot altogether dismiss the subject without some observations on the state of our West-India islands.

Before the late war, they were flourishing and happy. They had a free commerce with America; and were not only supplied at their own door with its productions in abundance, at a cheap and easy rate;

rate; but their rum, the produce of their offal from the manufacture of sugar, was received in barter, or paid for in specie at a fair and equitable price. From that source they were supplied with the means of purchasing other objects, necessary either for the purposes of their estates, or the domestic consumption of the planter.

In the war, all the Windward Islands, Barbadoes and Antigua excepted, were captured by the enemy; and were for a number of years under the dominion of the bayonet, by whose agency large contributions were extorted from them under various pretences. During that time their estates were but ill cultivated, in consequence of the draft made for the use of the conquerors. Many were pillaged by the soldiery, and more devastated by different hurricanes; and such even as escaped, were rendered unproductive to their owners by the heavy charges attending their cultivation, and the transportation of their produce, which was for a long time exposed to depredation and capture both by friends and enemies. Calamities of almost equal magnitude affected the other islands.—The consequence was, that, at the end of the war in eighty-three, the planters found themselves loaded with accumulated debt, and in the possession of ruined buildings, and of gangs of negroes much reduced in number and efficiency.—They had reason to look to the parent-state for relief; but, instead of relief, they found an augmented duty of six shillings per hundred-weight on their sugars, and their trade with America so narrowed and confined, as to oblige them to pay more than double, and on some articles treble, what they paid before for the productions of the continent.—In that instance

instance they, and the slaves of whom we now bear so much, were sacrificed to the interest of navigation.

Their rum-spirits being proportionably reduced in value, so as to be totally inadequate to the purpose of providing them with American products indispensably necessary to themselves and negroes; have suffered a still further depreciation by a statute of the last sessions, passed in confirmation of the treaty with France; which gives such encouragement to the introduction of her brandies into this kingdom, as silences all competition from rum, to which, when in any considerable quantity, the British ports are now virtually shut.— In this instance the colonies were sacrificed to the interest of commerce.

At present it is proposed to abolish the slave-trade; and there can doubtless be no reasonable objection made to a further oppression of the colonies for the interest of humanity.

From circumstances such as these, what else can be inferred than that the West-India islands are systematically devoted to ruin; and their ruin must consequently and inevitably ensue. Already, from the little progress made in the payment of their debts to the merchants of this country, and the supposed instability of West-India property, (open to attacks as it is from the enemy and the mother-country,) all West-India credit is at an end. No planter finds it practicable to negotiate a loan to relieve the disorders of his estate; and many are in such distress, that their utmost hope can only be to palliate evils as well as they can; like men arrested in a quicksand, whose efforts to disengage themselves tend only to a painful

painful prolongation of misery until they are finally ingulphed. Such is the situation of a great many in the colonies at this day ; and many more there are, who, with present prospects not quite so desperate, must, if the proposed regulation take place, be involved in the same fate.

It is notorious to those who have looked into human nature, that necessity makes many men knaves, whom affluence would have preserved honest ; and, when matters are come to the extremity, that palliatives can avail no longer and instant ruin threatens, men will be apt to accept the protection held out by the French and Spaniards, from whom they can command any quantity of land ; and will remove with their negroes ; leaving to their creditors a naked estate, which it will be impossible again to render productive when the supply from Africa is extinguished.

This I will venture to predict will be the frequent consequence of any measures, (particularly such as are now in agitation,) which may tend still further to the oppression of the sugar-colonies, and to reduce the profits of the West-India estates ; which are at present far from being sources of much clear revenue, a few instances excepted, (such as occur in all situations.) — No error can be greater or yet I believe more prevalent, than supposing that sugar-estates render a very large interest on the capitals vested in them. This error arises from a consideration of the magnitude of their incomes, considered independent of their expences ; but deduct the aggregate expences, and extend the calculation to a series of years sufficiently great to embrace the contingencies of fire, tempest, mortality, and the enemy ;

my ; and I am persuaded it will appear that there is scarcely any trade, occupation, or profession, in this country, which doth not reward its votaries with more ample and solid benefits, than the cultivation of a sugar or any other West-Indian estate ; especially when the necessity of frequent residence of the proprietors in distant and unhealthy climates is considered.

Writers have made mention of the French code for the regimen of negroes, and have ascribed to its operation the good treatment of their slaves ; but they are mistaken in the cause, though not in the fact.—The *Code Noir* doubtless designs to secure good treatment to slaves, but it is a mere dead letter ; like many other French edicts, which do not survive a month, if they do not actually drop abortive from the hand of authority. Were men to infer the condition of French citizens from the excellence of their laws, perhaps in many instances they would not suffer even from a competition with our own ; but it is the misfortune of the French, particularly in the sugar-colonies, to have no effective laws ; the will of the local chief enacting, abrogating, or dispensing with, laws, just as he sees fit.—But, though the *Code Noir* be an inoperative ordinance, still the French treat their slaves much better than we do ours ; that is, so far as regards their food and raiment. As to labour and punishment, they do not treat them so well, as they oblige them to work much more, and their punishments are infinitely more severe. But labour and discipline do not constitute the principal hardships of a negro. It is the want of a proper quantity of food, and

and a due attention to the sick, which most oppress them ; and in these instances the French slaves are certainly much better circumstanced than the English. The reason is obvious : The French have but few negroes in proportion to the extent of their estates, which were originally granted gratis in ample allotments ; (and not put up and disposed of as ours were in the ceded islands, in small parcels, and every art exerted to screw the bidders up to as high a price as possible.) They can therefore afford, without the sacrifice of any thing that is valuable to them, to allow large tracts for the provisioning of their negroes. — But it is not in the colonies only that the French make better masters than the English ; for they have the same superiority in the treatment of their servants in Europe. Wherever tyranny is tolerated, they are certainly the mildest tyrants.

I am however launching into matter foreign to what I proposed in my title-page ; and shall therefore conclude with requesting those gentlemen, who shall deign to cast their eyes over these sheets, to revolve in their minds the impracticability of freeing the negroes, and the impolicy of abolishing the Slave-trade under present circumstances.

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